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AUTHOR Klonsky, Bruce G.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Children's leadership expression in different types of group activities from early elementary school through high school was examined. Parents and teachers of 354 Western New York kindergarten through twelfth-grade public school students completed questionnaires assessing the children's leadership expression. Results indicated that leadership in social activities outside the family was greater for junior high and high school students than for younger students, while leadership in family activities was less. Female students were more involved in social activities, and better at leading social activities, than were males. Implications of the results for leadership training programs are discussed. A list of 14 references is provided. (BC)

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Grade and Sex Differences in Children's Leadership Expression

Bruce G. Klonsky, Rosemary Phillips, Robert Piato, & Paul Blanchet

SUNY, College at Fredonia

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A full-length version of this paper will be available from the first author. The mailing address is Psychology Department, SUNY, College at Fredonia, Thompson Hall W339, Fredonia, NY 14063.

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Abstract

Studies of the nature of leadership development in childhood and adolescence have been rare. Our research objective was to identify the nature of and changes in male and female children's leadership expression in various group activities across different grade levels.

Parents and teachers of 354 public school students (131 males, 223 females) from kindergarten through 12th-grade completed questionnaires assessing children's leadership expression. A series of 2 (Sex of Child) X 4 (Grade Level) ANOVAs were carried out for parental and teacher perceptions of children's leadership expression.

It was discovered that while children's leadership involvement in social activities outside the family increased for junior high and high school groups, leadership involvement in family activities decreased. Females were rated as more involved and better at leading in sex-appropriate activities than their male counterparts.

Implications of our findings for school leadership training programs and future leadership involvement will be discussed.

Objectives, Literature Review, and Major Hypotheses

Our major objective was to identify the nature of and changes in male and female children's leadership expression in different types of group activities during the period from early elementary school through high school. Such studies of the nature of leadership development have been rare (Bass, 1981; Klonsky, 1983).

Grade/Age Differences

There is considerable evidence (e.g., Condry, Siman, & Bronfenbrenner, 1968) that by the 7th-grade, boys and girls typically spend as much or more time interacting with their peers than with parents. This increased responsiveness to and involvement with peers seems to continue until about the 11th-grade (e.g., Berndt, 1979). Such findings led us to predict that the child's leadership involvement in social activities outside of the family (school clubs, youth groups, etc.) would increase during the junior high and high school years, while leadership in family activities (e.g., taking care of younger siblings, helping to organize outings) would decrease during this adolescent period (Hypothesis I).

Sex Differences

Research has indicated that we tend to look more favorably upon individuals engaging in sex-appropriate group leadership activities and roles (e.g., Eagly & Johnson, In Press; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, In Press). In our society, school and school-related activities, social activities outside the family, and many family activities are viewed as feminine in nature (e.g., Kagan & Moss, 1962; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Such findings led us to predict that girls would be seen by both parents and teachers as more involved than boys in leadership positions and roles and as having greater leadership ability in feminine- than masculine-typed activities (Hypothesis II).

Method

Subjects

Parents and teachers of 354 Western New York public school students (131 males, 223 females) from kindergarten through 12th-grade completed questionnaires.

Procedures and Instruments

Parents were contacted after their child's classroom teacher indicated a willingness to participate in the study. At least one parent/guardian of the child was asked to compete the Parent Questionnaire. The Parent Questionnaire requested demographic information about themselves and their children, information about the parent's leadership involvement during his/her own school career and recently, and ratings of their child's leadership involvement and ability in a variety of activities/groups. The Teacher Questionnaire requested comparable evaluations of students in the area of leadership.

Leadership involvement and leadership ability items were adapted from the Project Talent leadership items (Hynes, Richardson & Asher, 1978) and from items employed in other youth leadership research (Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Klonsky, 1983). Parents assessed their child's overall leadership involvement in various domains (e.g., family) with 5-point rating scales ranging from "1" Never to "5" Every day. The 5-point scale leadership role involvement items were adapted from Johnson and Johnson's (1982) work and Halpin & Winer's (1957) Ohio State factor analytic research. The parental assessment of the child's leadership ability in the family, sport, and social activities was done with 5-point rating scales ranging from "1" Poor to "5" Excellent.

Parents and teachers made overall assessments of the child's leadership ability on 6-point rating scales ranging from 1 "In top 10% of the children of his/her age and sex" to 6 "In the bottom 10% of his/her age and sex." Parents and teachers also rated the children on other social, personality, and intellectual characteristics (e.g., responsibility and communication skills) using the same 6-point rating format. Teachers also provided comparable data on students' overall leadership involvement and participation in specific leadership roles in their classes.

Results

A series of 2 (Sex of Child) X 4 (Grade Level) ANOVAs were carried out for parental and teacher perceptions of children's leadership expression. Teacher perceptions of children's leadership expression will be reported in more detail in the expanded version of this paper available upon request.

Hypothesis I received solid support (see Table 1). Grade differences in leadership expression emerged in all but sport and play activities. Leadership ability and involvement in social activities outside the family and in specific roles were greater for junior high and high school students than their elementary school counterparts. Involvement in socioemotional leadership roles in social activities exhibited the sharpest increase during the junior high and high school years. Overall leadership involvement within the family unit and in specific roles was less for junior high and high school students than their elementary school counterparts.

As predicted (Hypothesis II), females were seen as more frequently involved in and better at leading social activities than their male counterparts. Females were also perceived as more frequently involved than males in a variety of leadership roles in the classroom, in family activities, and in social activities outside the family (see Table 2). Sex differences in involvement in specific leadership roles appeared greatest in classroom learning activities.

Results (continued)

As Table 3 indicates, there were also a number of significant Grade X Sex interaction effects concerning frequency of the child's involvement in specific leadership roles as reported by parents. During the junior high school and early elementary school periods, females exhibited their greatest edge over their male counterparts in (a) peacemaking and direction giving in social activities and (b) communication helping in social and learning activities.

During the high school period, males were viewed as being more frequently involved in instrumental leadership roles such as coordinator, direction giver, and information processor in social activities than females. During the late elementary school period, females were seen by parents (and teachers) as having the largest edge over males in overall leadership ability.

Parental reports indicate that there is a moderate amount of consistency (most Pearson _r_s between .30 and .70) in children's leadership ability and leadership involvement across family, social, and sport activities, particularly after the early elementary school years.

Similarly, there appears to be moderate levels of interrater agreement between teachers of different courses with regard to student leadership ability assessments in junior high and high school, respectively. Interrater agreement was higher for female students' leadership ratings ($\underline{r} = .60$) than for male students' leadership ratings ($\underline{r} = .38$).

Conclusions

1. **Leadership ability and involvement in social activities outside the family and in specific roles appear greater for junior high and high school students than their younger counterparts. Involvement in socioemotional leadership roles in such activities show the sharpest increases during this developmental period.**

2. **Female students appear more frequently involved in leadership roles in more feminine sex-typed activities (e.g., in social activities and classroom learning activities).**

3. **Generally, female students appear to be more frequently involved in leadership roles in social and classroom learning activities than their male counterparts through junior high school. In high school, males were seen as more frequently involved in instrumental leadership roles than their female counterparts.**

4. **During the late elementary school period, female students were seen as having their largest edge over male students in overall leadership ability.**

5. **There appears to be a moderate degree of consistency in children's leadership ability and involvement across activities, particularly after the early elementary school years.**

Implications

1. **Leadership development/training programs for female students should concentrate on making them aware of opportunities for leadership (particularly outside of traditional sex-typed social activities), and encourage them to take advantage of the leadership opportunities.**

2. **Leadership development/training programs for male students should focus on the development of socioemotional types of leadership skills (e.g., communication helping, peacemaking, role-taking, etc.), especially at schools with a lower-socioeconomic level population where sex-typing of leadership roles might be greater (Klonsky, Rockwell, Siller, & Munoz, 1990).**

3. **Students of both sexes would benefit from leadership development/training programs that would assist them in making accurate appraisals of their abilities and abilities of others relevant to leadership situations. As early as the first grade, boys and girls are already underestimating the leadership ability of female classmates (Pollis & Doyle, 1972). This is especially disturbing in the case of female students given their edge in skills that could contribute to their being effective leaders (verbal ability, role-taking, etc.) (e.g., Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).**

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Table 1
Grade Level Differences in Children's Leadership Expression

Activity/Group	Grade Levels				F
	K-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	
Frequency of Leadership Involvement [a]					
Family	3.82	3.56	3.46	3.33	2.64**
Social	2.50	2.62	2.84	2.83	2.03
Frequency of Involvement in Specific Leadership Roles [b]					
INFORMATION PROCESSOR					
Family	4.26	4.08	3.83	3.60	8.65****
Learning	3.86	3.77	3.46	3.49	2.72**
COORDINATOR					
Family	3.76	3.66	3.39	3.37	2.53*
Learning	3.64	3.70	3.32	3.43	2.00
DIRECTION GIVER					
Family	3.86	3.67	3.35	3.35	4.03***
Learning	3.48	3.28	3.06	3.11	1.78 [c]
ENCOURAGER					
Family	4.17	3.91	3.57	3.55	4.82***
Learning	3.93	3.76	3.41	3.56	2.47*
Social	3.66	3.62	3.50	3.81	1.78 [d]
PEACEMAKER					
Social	3.02	3.03	3.39	3.53	4.66***
COMMUNICATION HELPER					
Social	3.15	3.11	3.20	3.52	3.27**
Leadership Ability [e]					
Social	3.00	3.44	3.30	3.56	3.12**

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

Table 1 (Notes)
Grade Level Differences in Children's Leadership Expression

[a] **The Ns were 44, 61, 109, and 139, and the df were 3, 345.**

[b] **Information Processor Ns were 42, 61, 107, and 136, and the df were 3, 338.**

Coordinator Ns were 42, 61, 103, and 131, and the df were 3, 329.

Direction Giver Ns were 42, 60, 104, and 133, and the df were 3, 331.

Encourager Ns were 41, 58, 103, and 132, and the df were 3, 326.

Peacemaker Ns were 41, 61, 101, and 132, and df were 3, 327.

Communication Helper Ns were 41, 61, 103, and 133, and df were 3, 330.

[c] **This and previous the nonsignificant trend had $p \leq .15$.**

[d] **$p = .15$.**

[e] **The Ns were 42, 59, 108, and 138, and df were 3, 339.**

Table 2
Sex Differences in Children's Leadership Expression

Activity/Group	Sex of Child		F
	Male	Female	
Frequency of Leadership Involvement [a]			
Social	2.54	2.89	9.50***
Frequency of Involvement in Specific Leadership Roles [b]			
INFORMATION PROCESSOR			
Learning [c]	3.39	3.68	6.70***
COORDINATOR			
Learning	3.28	3.58	5.71**
DIRECTION GIVER			
Learning	2.99	3.27	4.84**
Family	3.32	3.55	3.35*
ENCOURAGER			
Learning	3.38	3.71	6.53**
Family	3.54	3.79	2.86*
Social	3.52	3.74	3.46*
PEACEMAKER			
Learning	3.15	3.38	4.18**
Social	3.23	3.39	2.52*
COMMUNICATION HELPER			
Learning	2.99	3.40	12.82****
Family	3.11	3.38	5.04**
Leadership Ability [d]			
Social	3.20	3.50	6.31**
Overall Assessment	4.08	4.30	2.39

* p <.10. ** p < .05. *** p <.01. **** p <.001.

Table 2 (Notes)
Sex Differences in Children's Leadership Expression

[a] **The male N was 131, while the female N was 222. Df were 1, 345.**

[b] **For the Information Processor analyses, there were 126 males and 220 females, and df were 1, 338.**

For the Coordinator analyses, there were 121 males and 216 females, and df were 1, 329.

For the Direction Giver analyses, there were 124 males and 215 females, and df were 1, 331.

For the Encourager analyses, there were 120 males and 214 females, and df were 1, 326.

For the Peacemaker analyses, there were 121 males and 214 females, and df were 1, 337.

For the Communication Helper analyses, there were 123 males and 215 females, and df were 1, 330.

[c] **Learning activities represent classroom learning activities.**

[d] **Social Activities analysis, males (129), females (218), df = 1, 339.**

Overall assessment, males (131), females (220), df = 1, 343, p = .12.

Table 3
Parental Reports on Children's Leadership Expression: Grade x Sex Interactions

Activity/Group	Sex of Child: Male, Grade Level K-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	Female, Grade Level K-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	F
Frequency of Leadership Involvement									
Sport/Play [a]	3.00	3.29	3.69	3.48	3.69	3.32	3.27	3.24	2.03
Frequency of Involvement in Specific Leadership Roles [b]									
INFORMATION PROCESSOR									
Social	3.38	3.65	3.16	3.58	3.53	3.39	3.65	3.47	2.52*
COORDINATOR									
Social	3.00	3.48	2.98	3.70	3.45	3.53	3.62	3.43	3.97***
DIRECTION GIVER									
Social	2.89	3.35	3.07	3.63	3.36	3.27	3.51	3.43	2.27*
Family	3.33	3.43	3.12	3.45	4.00	3.81	3.51	3.30	2.50*
ENCOURAGER									
Learning	4.38	3.38	3.09	3.46	3.82	3.97	3.63	3.62	2.50*
PEACEMAKER									
Social	2.88	3.09	2.88	3.67	3.06	3.00	3.75	3.45	5.15***
Learning	2.88	3.30	2.88	3.35	3.33	3.24	3.49	3.38	2.15*
COMMUNICATION HELPER									
Social	2.88	3.35	2.81	3.55	3.21	2.97	3.48	3.50	3.77**
Learning	2.63	3.22	2.67	3.22	3.42	3.24	3.48	3.40	2.95**
.mily	3.00	3.35	2.91	3.20	3.45	3.26	3.52	3.30	1.92
Leadership Ability [c]									
Overall	4.33	3.63	4.02	4.29	4.31	4.55	4.25	4.23	2.13*

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .005$. *** $p < .01$.

Table 3 (Notes)
Parental Reports on Children's Leadership Expression: Grade x Sex Interactions

[a] The Ns were 9, 24, 46, 52, 35, 37, 63, & 87, and df = 3, 345.

[b] The Information Processor Ns were 8, 23, 45, 50, 34, 38, 62, & 86, and the df = 3, 338.

The Coordinator Ns were 9, 23, 42, 47, 33, 38, 61, & 84, and the df = 3, 329.

The Direction Giver Ns were 9, 23, 43, 49, 33, 37, 61, & 84, and the df = 3, 331.

The Encourager Ns were 8, 21, 43, 48, 33, 37, 60, & 84, and df = 3, 326.

The Peacemaker Ns were 8, 23, 42, 48, 33, 38, 59, & 84, and df = 3, 327.

The Communication Helper Ns were 8, 23, 43, 49, 33, 38, 60, & 84, and df = 3, 330.

[c] The Ns were 9, 24, 46, 53, 35, 38, 61, & 86, and df = 3, 343.